

FICTION  
ESSAYS  
POETRY



WRITING

UCONN

SPRING 1983

The Connecticut Writing Project  
and  
The English Department of the  
University of Connecticut

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Mollie A. Robinson  
George Roller  
Joseph Whiting



#### MESSAGE TO STUDENTS

This is a publication of student writing. Small, humble, and unfrilled, it makes a start. The writings are of several sorts--fiction, poetry, essays; but we invite less formal modes. Even good answers to essay exam questions are a possibility, as are appealing sketches out of a diary. Our purpose is to put writing into the lives of students as a way of apprehending and responding to the world.

To this end we invite submissions for future issues. We would also be glad to have a name for this new publication more imaginative than WRITING UCONN 19--. As to the cover, something eye-catching might help us to snare the peripatetic scholar, whose eye is ever on greener pastures. We therefore invite students to submit names and cover designs in hopes that the lure of immortality, however brief, will stimulate creation, make us friends, and bring us out of our darkness.

We have done some editing and cutting of the selections; but the work is the students'. Please watch for our announcements each term. In posters, ads, and news articles we will be asking for submissions. As we grow, we hope to include graphics and drawings. Work from courses is expected to provide a rich source for items accepted for publication. Material selected will receive statewide distribution through the Connecticut Writing Project. Work offered for consideration should be sent or brought to:

Matthew N. Proser  
Department of English, U-25  
332 Arjona Building  
University of Connecticut  
Storrs, CT 06268

We hope you will enjoy and support this new publication.

Matthew N. Proser  
Barbara Rosen  
William E. Sheidley

#### ME AND MR. BARKER

Amanda Platt

One September day, when I was in the sixth grade, Sharon Barker invited me to her house for dinner. Happy to have found a friend at my new school, I accepted eagerly.

That afternoon, Mom drove me to Sharon's house. The Barker home was typical of middle-class, rural New England: it seemed as if it could not decide whether it was a traditional farmyard or a modern suburban dwelling. The yard smelled of manure. Chickens pecked at stones in the driveway, and over by the woodpile, a tethered billy goat munched noisily. But the farm scene was not complete. There was no barn, no farm machinery. Instead, two cars were parked near the house, and a motorcycle leaned against the back door. The interior was contemporary--color TV, wall-to-wall shag carpeting, even a trash compactor.

After Mom left, Sharon beckoned me to follow her downstairs to the basement, promising to show me something "really neat." "My dad's skinning muskrats," she announced as we reached the bottom of the stairs. She pointed. I followed the direction of her finger with my eyes, to the far corner of the room. A big man stood with his back to us. He was at least six feet tall, with a straight back and broad, muscular shoulders. When he turned, I saw a face that had spent many years outdoors: his nose and cheeks were sunburnt; the wrinkles and creases around his eyes, which were no doubt caused by squinting against the sun's glare, looked like a craftsman's toolings on the leather of his skin. He had no moustache, but wore a full beard, like an Amish man, which was black with gray patches scattered throughout. He smiled to greet me, revealing huge, yellow, horse-like teeth. When he shook my hand, I felt as though my fingers were being swallowed by an immense callous.

"Watch this," he proudly commanded, as he picked a small, furry object out of the barrel beside me. I peered into the barrel and saw a heap of brown bodies. They were muskrats. As he prepared the animal for skinning, he told us of his catch that



day. "I got fourteen of these and three beavers," he boasted as he fastened the tail and hind legs of the muskrat to metal clips which were suspended from the ceiling by chains. "I would have gotten another," he added, "but one of the damned things chewed its leg off to get outa the trap. It musta dragged itself pretty far, 'cause I couldn't find it anywheres."

As he said this, I pictured a muskrat, stricken with terror, gnawing on its own limb in a desperate effort to free itself from the steel jaws of the trap. I realized that I was probably not going to enjoy the rest of the exhibition. I was right.

Mr. Barker's muskrat was now hanging, head downward, from the chains. Mr. Barker took a knife and cut from the tail to each of the hind legs. Then, after making a few minor incisions on the rest of the body, he proceeded to peel the skin off. He started at the hind legs and pulled toward the head, as if he were taking a tight jersey off a small child. The hide came off in one piece.

What was left of the muskrat swung to and fro from the chains. It was perfectly naked. There was no blood. It was exactly as it had been before, only smaller, with pink, glistening, muscle tissue showing where brown fur had been. I felt sorry for the puny creature, dangling pathetically in mid-air.

Mr. Barker's huge hand grasped the tiny carcass by the neck to stop its swinging. With a sly look at Sharon, he cried, "Now, we'll have some fun!" He picked up the knife again, looking thoughtfully at the muskrat. I saw the blade flash as he made a quick cut in the muscle of the abdomen. Intestines cascaded to the floor. He slashed at the body again. More intestines fell. Yards and yards of snaky, pink tubing swung in a slimy, tangled mass from the ravaged corpse. Blood oozed over the muskrat and splashed onto the floor.

I closed my eyes as I felt my stomach heave. My heart raced and my palms became sweaty. A weakness came over me suddenly. I slumped to the floor and concentrated on fighting the nausea which was enveloping me.

I could hear Mr. Barker's laughter; it was coming

closer to me. I opened my eyes to see him standing over me, waving a fistful of gore. I was assaulted by a horrible stench as he wiggled the intestines in front of my face, giggling, "This here's nigger food." I stared at him in disbelief--I had never heard anyone use that word before.

"Wh-what?" I stammered.

"Niggers. You know...jigaboos...jungle-bunnies," and he stuck out his lower lip in illustration. "They love this stuff."

In my mind, I saw the Wallaces, a black family from my old neighborhood, sitting at the dinner table, passing around bowls of muskrat innards. This image was more than my stomach could bear. Pushing Mr. Barker away from me, I bolted up the stairs to the bathroom.

They took me home.

Before Mom could ask why I was home so early, I was in tears. I flung myself into her arms, sobbing uncontrollably. "It's wrong here...it's wrong here," was all I could gasp between sobs. "I know," she murmured, and she held me for a long time.

Written for English 146. Ms. Platt majors in English.

POETRY BY JOSEPH WHITING

THE RESOLUTION

A cup of coffee sits steaming;  
the words were friendly but final.

My elbows are sore from the hard  
kitchen table and  
the sun is rising.

I button my shirt sleeves  
and leave quietly,

trying not to wake her children.

A MARXIST VIEW

To think  
that all my Hope

rests dangerously  
somehow

on the word  
you will mutter

or not,  
that it's all revealed

for a beath of  
Yes,

that (as if by an angry quirk of  
Fate),

my archaic phrases surface,

only troubles me  
in a remote, historical sense.

FINDING OUT

It's like never having known you,  
explaining you away.

Jesus, I wished you smoked.  
Then you'd know  
the lingering silence of smoke  
on the downtown platform,  
your only memory  
in your feet.

Single file  
five flights  
to a view--  
an apartment with broken chairs,  
Peter Max  
and no real closet space.

The faulty soprano on 34th  
annoyed you;  
the man with the dancing lion  
and his Spanish prayers;  
Saigon Cat, Black Dove,

the stuff of our walking  
and contempt.

RURAL SUNDAY

A brief splash of light,  
your fingers in his beard.

Doting patriarchs cough their disapproval  
as you secretly curl

your feet beneath the pew,  
hymn books folded discreetly in your laps;

your fingers  
warm, forgiving.

The word  
reaches you in a giggle.

Written for English 246. Mr. Whiting majors in  
Journalism.



TOBACCO AND MOONPIES; OR, HOW I BUILT  
FORTITUDE ONE SUMMER

Mollie A. Robinson

Two years ago I decided that I could no longer live with my parents. After several attempts at explaining myself to them, and several inevitable arguments, I simply proceeded on my own with a course of action. I made a few phone calls to friends in the South, cleared out my humble bank account, and embarked on a 15-hour train ride from New York City's Pennsylvania Station to Richmond, Virginia. I was prepared for great changes in my life.

Young and naive as I was, I imagined that self-support would start immediately as soon as I got that first job, which assuredly would be easy. Or so I thought. Instead of accumulating paychecks, however, I only accumulated the frustrations of unemployment: I had too much empty time. The friend I was living with worked as a reporter at a local newspaper, and she kept such erratic hours that I barely ever saw her. Thus I was left to fend for myself.

Day after day I hit all of the area business establishments, attempting to sell myself as blatantly as a Fuller brush. Times are periodically tough everywhere, but they are continuously so in rural Virginia. As talented and brilliant as I fancied myself, no one seemed to desire the manifold skills I was so ready to offer.

My temper shortened and I often snapped at my friend as she elaborated on her often tedious though very desirable (to me, any kind of work was desirable) reporting job. One evening, Sylvia had me proof-read an article she was writing on the mainstay of Virginia's economy--the tobacco industry. Virginia loved her tobacco, and tobacco, apparently, was fairly good to Virginia. My money-hungry mind began to whirr. Though tobacco work was traditionally considered pretty menial labor, I no longer had any scruples about types of employment. Letters were rolling in frequently from Mom and Dad, asking for explicit details concerning my financial status, and, sadly, I didn't have one to write about.

I got the names of some tobacco farmers in the area from Sylvia and started phoning farmers to see if they needed any help for the summer. I got a positive response on the very first call: a farmer named Jack Conners told me that he could always use some extra hands! He mentioned that several kids from town rode out to his farm every day, and gave me another phone number to call so as to work out a ride for the following morning--at 5:00 a.m. The starting time was a bit intimidating; nevertheless, after three miserable weeks, I had finally landed a job!

Trey Harrison was the boy I called about the ride. He lived quite close to Sylvia and me and said he would gladly pick me up in the morning as long as I was waiting at the end of my driveway at 5:00 a.m. sharp. Getting up at 4:30 a.m., even after eight hours of sleep, was none too pleasant, but I somehow managed to crawl out of bed, pull on some old jeans and a sweatshirt, grab a doughnut, and walk down the driveway. Sure enough, right at 5:00, a pickup truck pulled up in front of the house, and Trey, gangly, close-cropped, and smiley, leaned out of the window, introducing himself. He told me to climb in the back of the pickup with the eight other guys (I was the only girl). We made some hasty introductions, and we were off. I had known that it would still be dark this early in the morning, but I was totally unprepared for the bitter cold--incredibly worse in the windy back of a pickup truck. I shivered in my corner throughout the 45-minute ride out to the Conners' farm.

Jack Conners owned an immense amount of land, and tobacco plants filled almost every inch of it, spreading in all directions, far into the horizon. The thought of dealing with all those millions of tobacco leaves made me instantly nervous: what had I gotten myself into? It turned out that the only other women working, besides myself, were Mrs. Conners and her daughter Katherine. The other twenty or so workers were all male--Mr. Conners, his sons and nephews, boys from town, and Mexican migrant laborers. After counting off heads and deciding how to divide up the labor, Mr. Connors had us all pile into his two trucks, and we drove through about ten miles of tobacco country to the field we were working on that day.



When we got there, most of the men drove off in one truck down to the very center of the tobacco field. Mr. Conners, a man named Jake, Mrs. Connors, Katherine and I all went in the other truck to the tobacco barns. I remained silent, mostly in awe of the matter-of-factness of everyone else toward what for me was a confusing new business. Mr. Conners then explained to me that I'd be working with Mrs. Connors and Katherine on the "stringer." It was 6:30 a.m. when we finally started to work, and I was scared by this time.

The process, as I eventually came to understand it, went like this. The men (women weren't allowed to do such strenuous work) went out into the fields and "pulled" (never say "picked"! ) the first layer of tobacco leaves from the plants, bottom to top, row by row. The leaves were tucked under the puller's arm, as he bent over the plants, until the bundle became too large and cumbersome. The leaves were then laid, stems out, on a flat-bed trailer. When the trailer became piled high with leaves, it was hooked to a tractor and hauled over to the barn. The tractor-driver left the trailer there and drove back to the fields, where the pullers were already loading leaves onto another trailer. We three women then stood in front of the "stringer," a conveyor-belt machine, with the trailer backed up horizontally right behind us. The two men stood in the barn doorway, with the stringer feeding directly into it. Resting on a hook right above the stringer was a basket containing several long sticks, each about a yard long.

When the conveyor-belt started up, the woman at the front of the line grabbed a handful of leaves from the trailer behind her and spread them flat, the length of a stick, on the stringer. The next woman took a stick and placed it horizontally on top of the tobacco leaves, and the last woman spread another layer of leaves on top of the stick (we rotated these positions throughout the day). The stick then ran through the actual stringing part of the stringer: a kind of big sewing machine at the end of the conveyor-belt, right at the entrance to the barn. The stick of leaves ran through this sewing machine, and the layers of leaves were sewn together, with thick string, at the stems, right above the stick. As it went through the stringer, Mr. Conners, standing in the barn door, would grab the stick by both ends as it came off the end of the stringer.

The leaves hung firmly down from the stick, and Mr. Conners could then pass it up to Jake, who was standing in the rafters of the barn. The rafters ran throughout the barn, less than a yard apart and about four feet above each other. Jake would grab the stick, and rest it between two beams in the top of the barn, gradually moving down to the lower rafters as the barn became filled.

When the entire barn was packed with sticks of upside-down, drying tobacco leaves (after about two weeks of pulling), the work in it would be declared "done," and our entire crew would move on to another field and yet another barn. A "done" barn would be closed and locked, with kerosene stoves left burning on the floor to cure the leaves. In 3-4 weeks the leaves would be ready for the market, and we'd take down the sticks in the same manner that we'd hoisted them up, but in reverse. Then we'd strip the leaves from the sticks, and sort them into piles on the floor according to grades of tobacco. Finally, the leaves would be stuffed, tenderly, into huge clear plastic bags and loaded into Mr. Conners' trucks.

That was as far as I was involved in the tobacco business, but just from working with the Conners every day, I also learned about the crucial aspects of selling the tobacco. Farmers from all over the county would bring their leaves to warehouses where buyers representing various tobacco-product companies would inspect all of the tobacco grades. An auctioneer would take a microphone in the midst of the crowd, and, at rapid-fire pace, auction off each farmer's crop, on which the buyers would bid.

Most of the money reaped by the farmer was likely to be funneled back into labor and equipment and bills and the fall crops: soybeans, grains, and lentils. There didn't seem to be much money to be had in small-time tobacco farming. Yet, for farmers like Mr. Conners, tobacco farming was simply an age-old family tradition. Generations of Conners had been planting, harvesting, and selling tobacco using exactly the same methods as Jack Conners used (which definitely were out of step with the more modern trends in tobacco farming). The land he raised his crops on and the house he raised his family in had all been used by the Conners family for hundreds of years. Not raising tobacco would have been akin to betraying his family heritage. Though the profit was



low, Jack Conners never even questioned his line of work.

For us "city kids," however, who drove in daily to take part in this family tradition, working tobacco was a good job. The work was hard, so we developed nice muscles and became stronger, and, to us, the pay was good--about \$5 an hour. That first day on the job, though, I almost got violently ill several times, as the nauseating stench of the tobacco leaves made me sick to my stomach, not to mention the disgustingly fat, green tobacco worms that were crawling all over the plants as we laid them down on the stringer! Tobacco leaves are also covered with a liquid film called "wax" because it coats your fingers and hands as you handle the leaves, turning them black and waxy (this stuff would stay under my fingernails throughout the entire summer).

That first day, as I acquainted myself with these noxious surprises, I fumbled furiously with the stringer, never laying my leaves down fast enough, and felt very "citified" indeed, as Mrs. Conners and Katherine had to work doubly hard to make up for my time-consuming blunders. But they were always patient and let me discover my capabilities at my own pace. My back, shoulders, arms, and hands ached from turning constantly back and forth from the trailer and grabbing handfuls of leaves to lay down on the stringer, and I was incredibly sweaty and dirty.

At last, at 9:30 a.m., Mrs. Conners, ever the voice of the family, yelled for us all to take a break. The boys out in the fields stopped working, too, and as we drank frosty bottles of delicious Coke and slurped down slices of watermelon, we could see the men in the distance, gulping canteens and canteens of water before starting to eat. The sugar renewed our energy, and we got back to work, continuing our stringing into the oppressive heat of noon. Everyone then came in from the fields, and we all had lunch together.

Mrs. Conners pulled two enormous coolers out from the back of one of the trucks, and opened up the first, which was loaded with brown paper lunch bags. Each bag was individually marked with someone's name; Trey passed me mine. I opened it up and discovered

two cheese sandwiches and two MoonPies (heavenly marshmallow-filled, chocolate-covered, cookie treats!). The other cooler was filled with icy bottles of soda, and I grabbed another Coke. We ate our sandwiches half-wrapped in tin foil because our hands were still coated with tobacco wax (no place to wash them out in the fields). But my lord, how we craved the simple delight of cheese sandwiches, MoonPies, and Cokes! Our whole morning was geared toward this noon-time meal when we all ended our backbreaking labor, rested on the ground underneath the lovely shade of the barn awning, told jokes, and enjoyed every wonderful morsel of those bag lunches, prepared by Mrs. Conners.

After lunch, we'd all load up in the trucks and go back to the Conners' farmhouse, as it was now too hot to work effectively any longer. Mrs. Conners would write us daily checks from her personal account, and we'd drive back to town in Trey's little pickup, this time luxuriating in the wind that brushed over our faces and tousled our hair in a thoroughly pleasurable manner. We were exhausted, dirty, so very glad that the work was done, yet exhilarated with a "high" which comes from physically exerting oneself and satisfactorily completing a job.

As soon as I got home, I collapsed on the living room carpet for several hours, feeling weaker and filthier than I ever had in my life, yet proud of myself for working so hard and well and for liking the job, demanding though it was. I even wanted to go back again the next day!

Every day I went back. Any time I wasn't sleeping or carousing, I was pulling tobacco with the Conners. I loved my job and the people I worked with, and grew in directions I had never anticipated when my original intent was simply to break away from my parents. I became tanned and strong, increased my comprehension of Spanish from talking with the Mexicans, shared philosophies with people whose opinions were vastly different from my own, helped a family raise crops to support itself during the upcoming year, made enough money to keep myself, and tested new regions of my own self-sufficiency. I had set out to explore the depths of myself, and was very pleased with the amount of strength and



determination I discovered there. Though I realized  
I would never return to this tobacco life, I also  
knew that it would never leave me.

Written for English 246. Ms. Robinson majors in  
Communications.

## POEMS BY JANE E. HARVEY

## LESSON 1

After it was over you fell asleep.

Dawn:  
Turning the room newspaper gray,  
You lay  
Not touching me.

I had looked into your eyes, wishing I could fall in.  
Now I am trying to think of their color.

Hide my burning face in cool sheets.

## OUT THE WINDOW

The rain must be  
The same color as the sky, because I  
Cannot see it except as it  
Flings itself past brick buildings.

On the sidewalks,  
Girls--  
Spots of vibrancy against the gray.  
In bright raincoats with bent heads,  
Mincing steps around puddles.  
Boys  
Don't wear raincoats, they  
Get their hair wet  
And look very young, among the evergreens.



## TO BOSTON

This is the window you stare out of  
--drink your coffee before it gets cold--

See a triangle of winter sunlight  
pinned up on the opposite wall, backdrop  
For the black and white cat  
Jailed in by the fire escape.  
You, too  
Confined, but by empty pockets.  
Rub your forehead, the newsprint stays.

We bought that paper this morning.  
Walking, our laughter as brittle as the sunlight.  
I left you with luggage still unpacked, houseplants boxed,  
a jar of instant coffee and the want ads.

I closed the door, pushed the button "1," and  
Imagine you reaching to your guitar for comfort.

I look up at the window from the street.

Written for English 246. Ms. Harvey majors in English.

## WHAT LADONNA SAW

Jeff Denny

LaDonna walked downtown to the Wanderling Building, the heat rising through her sneakers. Her hair and skin were dry. Everything seemed without time and purpose, like desert sand sliding through a perpetually upended hourglass.

The traffic that roared beside her was numbing. She forgot her appointment at the beauty salon where her aunt was waiting to give her a permanent. Like mom used to get. LaDonna passed the glass-plate storefront of "The Hair Chair," mind adrift.

Later, after an elevator ride to the 110th floor, when she walked past Miss Stone, her father's receptionist, whose hair was permanently waved, LaDonna realized that she didn't really want to look like that anyway.

Miss Stone buzzed her intercom. "Mr. LaVine, your daughter is here to see you." Her voice was distorted by dry static like cracking gum. A paradigm of svelt self-assurance, the sort that graces the glossy women's magazines, Stone was soft, subtle, composed and intelligent. Skirts that rustled, shoes that tapped and eyes that flashed green. She was perfect to receive strangers.

LaDonna's father spoke with a half-grin when she closed his office door behind her. "Your aunt said she couldn't wait to chop off all your hair and shave your dead."

"Dad, I forgot to get my hair fixed." She fell into a swan-shaped white chair and watched her father balance an unlit cigarette upright on a playing card which covered the top of a tumbler. He had turned off the air conditioner so that it wouldn't blow the cigarette over. Now the room was too warm. "Got a quarter?" he asked.

On top of the cigarette he balanced the Taiwan dollar which an ex-Merchant Marine had given LaDonna. "All right," he said, "How much you wanna bet I can put this quarter into this glass without touching the coin, the cigarette, the glass or the card?"

"It's not a quarter, it's a Taiwan dollar," LaDonna



said. "And I know what you're going to do. You're going to shake your desk."

"Nope. How much you want to bet? Your college tuition? Your grandma's inheritance? The money we saved for your braces?"

"Dad, I forgot to get my hair fixed."

"O.K., watch this." He leaned over and twisted his neck around, face up so he looked crippled, and blew the playing card up and away from the glass. The coin bounced off the desk, the cigarette rolled to the stapler and the card flicked to the floor. "That's strange. It worked twice before," he said.

"It won't make any difference, really, how I look if I get my hair fixed or not."

LaVine snapped a match across a matchbook's flint strip. It hissed, flaring, and consumed the loose tobacco and paper on the end of the cigarette he put to his lips. The buzzer on his desk droned for a second, and Stone's static voice said, "Sir, a Mr. Bottomshod is here to see you. I told him that you are very busy..."

"Can't see him right now, Miss Stone. I'm trying to balance the third quarter. Put him on the intercom."

"It's a Taiwan dollar, Dad."

Outside Bottomshod boomed, his voice distorting the speaker, which buzzed with the sound.

"Lawrence, it's a joke. A lousy, stinking joke. My ass is on the line!"

LaDonna picked up a Rubic's Cube from her father's desk. It was heavy with gold plating on all its sides--a gift from the company for twenty-five years of service. Useless as a puzzle, it made a good paperweight. Her father spoke calmly to the shouting man in the next office over the intercom, telling him that he couldn't see him today. Next Tuesday.

Half smiling, he pushed the "off" button. "Took his ass off the line," he winked.

Sitting down, he leaned back in the chair and looked

at his fingernails. "Bottomshod sells those little pellets that turn into sea monkeys when you put them in your fishtank. Sounded really interesting, so I ordered eight cases to put in the swimming pool when the horizontal hold went on the T.V. But last night, voila! It stopped going up and down. Now Bottomshod wants a check, but I said to him 'You must be mistaken. Eight cases of sea monkeys? I never ordered them. Who would want eight cases of sea monkeys?'"

LaVine was talking to no one because LaDonna had taken the elevator to the top floor to wonder at the tiny cars below. But she remembered that there was a big fence about twelve feet from the perimeter so that people wouldn't jump off and hurt somebody. On the 150th floor she changed direction.

She went down to the company Xerox machine on the 11th floor to make some copies of her face. She didn't have to pay because she had made a duplicate of her father's key to the machine years ago--it wasn't her first time, although she usually forgot to pick up the copies.

Pulling back her hair and lifting the copier's lid, she pushed her nose onto the middle of the clean, cool smooth glass plate where it said "place paper here" and hit the button. She always promised herself this would be the time when she could keep her eyes open, but the flash was always too bright and the shock startled her.

"School starts next week," Stone said behind LaDonna. LaDonna's head was still wedged between the glass plate and the lid that closes over it. "Somebody told me you're not going."

"I'm not," LaDonna said with a start. She was shaken because Stone had seen her making copies with a key. Her breath steamed the glass plate, making a small wet spot around her nose. Her neck began to ache, but she continued. "I forgot to fill out all the forms and write letters to the colleges and take the tests. Besides that, when I took Shakespeare in 11th grade, every time the teacher talked about the Thane of Cawdor, all I could think of was the Thane of Caldor."

"Really? That's a problem. Are you making copies?" Putting down the sheaf of papers she was carrying, Stone bent to pull LaDonna's work from the machine. But when



LaDonna said "Don't touch those" in a quiet, tight voice muffled and distorted because her nose and mouth were still pressed to the glass, Stone froze.

"Is it, um, set on legal size...?" Stone asked, drawing back her fingers as if singed and crossing her hands behind her. But before she could say anything more LaDonna snatched the papers from the copier and ran down the hall to the elevators. One was discharging middle-aged men, so LaDonna knifed between them, her straight brown hair bobbing limply, and pushed the "door closed" button before Stone could say anything else.

LaDonna was alone in the elevator. Smooth recorded music oozed through the speaker in the ceiling. She pushed the button for the 151st floor--the top. The ride would be a long one, five minutes, a long time in a space so small. Lunch break was over for most people in the building, and LaDonna knew she would be uninterrupted on her way to the top.

So she sat on the floor. The elevator's movement made her heavy and limp, but she was comfortable, almost sleepy. She tried to picture herself, but the thought was elusive, like the stars you can see out of the corner of your eye that disappear when you try to look straight at them, so as to pick them out of their galaxy.

The elevator was lit a creamy yellow. The carpet, trampled by businessmen and secretaries, was a dirty gold, nearly brown. But soft. With the honeyed funereal music, the movement, the inconsequential time--LaDonna's eyes burned, she was pleasantly thirsty, and her skin was pinched and tight. It felt good to draw her fingers up her cheeks into her eyes and around her forehead.

After her elevator reached number 148, LaDonna stretched up from the floor to push the "stop" button. The elevator slowed, then came to a halt. The door snicked open. She yawned to release the pressure from her ears. She was truly alone. Hands in her pockets, whistling the last muzak with tongue and teeth, she wandered down the hall.

Finding a windowless conference office she knew was used only for annual reports, LaDonna closed the door softly behind her. In the dim light the long, wide pale wood table flanked with twelve beige cloth chairs looked

to LaDonna like an old sow with her piglets suckling. Except for a lectern waiting in a corner, there was nothing else in the room. No distractions.

Taking off her tennis shoes and her sweater, she tied the arms around her shoes and lay down. She pulled her hair aside and put the lumpy bundle behind her head. A chorus of men and women harmonizing like angels through a Burt Bacharach medley crooned LaDonna to sleep.

Her dream was interrupted by its implausibility, as if her reasoning mind was an irritated movie director yelling "Cut!" She dreamt that the mirrors in her bedroom were like the ones at the carnival--curved and distorted. They made her look like a warped and wobbly Dolly Parton. She awoke wondering if she was dreaming. Standing up too quickly, her head a helium balloon, one foot tingling, she limped to the hall without her shoes and sweater, and called the elevator. It arrived quickly, and she stepped inside to aim a finger at the "lobby" button. In her grogginess, she missed and pushed another button, so she had no choice but to stop at the 132nd floor.

It wasn't until the doors opened that LaDonna realized how long she had slept. The building was dark except for the dim floor lights. The muzak was off. The air conditioners, which hummed unnoticed during the day when people's attention was called by sensations that matter more, were silent. No typewriters ticked. No telephones burred. No intercoms buzzed. LaDonna could hear her pulse beat at her temples.

LaDonna had the sense of being Alone. And lonely. But free from emotion, a sensation she didn't wholly dislike. Knowing that there were vending machines in the building, LaDonna felt that she could stay in the building all night with all its floors to herself. She had security.

In jeans and a tee shirt, she padded with bare feet sinking into the carpet, looking for a restroom in the dim light. She pushed at a door marked "Mr. Womack." It swung in. Inside was an outer office guarding an inner office behind it, similar to her father's. The latch must have slipped. She entered, and though she was curious and feeling coltish, she didn't dare turn on the lights.



LaDonna sat primly behind the receptionist's desk in the murkiness. Her back was straight, her chin level. The receptionist had left her glasses on the desk, and LaDonna perched them on the end of her nose.

"I'm sorry, he's on another line at the moment, but if you wish to hold he will attend to you shortly," LaDonna said into the telephone's dial tone. She batted her eyelashes and pursed her lips.

With the only light coming dimly from under the door, the office loomed with shadow-box shapes. From far below the building's glass and steel came a faint occasional horn or hoot that echoed and lazed upward, passing the windows, rising until vaporized by the dying-summer moon. It cast the city in a late-night-T.V. glow. Below, midtown moved at midnight, but only with the purpose of graveyard shifters passing second shifters. The museum and shops and restaurants and all the places of daily commerce were as gloomy and still as the office where LaDonna sat.

She swivelled in the naugahyde chair until she saw the box of white rectangular calling cards ("Mr. T. Louis Womack, Organization") near the nameplate on the desk. He would blame the cleaning staff the next day when he found his cards in a scattered pile on his blotter, but LaDonna didn't think of him when she built a deranged skyscraper by balancing cards on their edges and supporting them with more cards. When it was nearly a foot tall the structure wobbled and collapsed like an accordion exhaling. Sitting back and looking around the office, she thought of her father and his detached stories about her mother. Once she hadn't come home for three days. He told LaDonna the tale with a half-grin. LaDonna decided on the inner office.

Darker and more still, the inner office smelled faintly of oiled wood and sour carpet glue and even more faintly of a men's after shave LaDonna didn't recognize. Walking around the dark lumps of familiar office objects, the filing cabinets and the shelves and the davenport and a philodendron's plater that barked her shin, she moved like a blind person. The only real light in the room came from a digital clock which hummed faintly and the needle of tarnished gold from underneath the door back to the outer office. She thought of the Rubic's Cube on her father's desk. Twenty-five years, LaDonna remembered. Before I was born.

Her sight adjusted to the gloom and she saw shelves of brown books like sliced whole-wheat bread covering the two walls. The carpeting was squishy between her toes. The chairs were overfed, buttoned leather. A buck poked his head from the panelled wall behind the desk. Someone had put a baseball cap on one antler, making it look like a cartoon character that had been hypnotized, expression dumb and glassy-eyed.

Then came a noise like an elevator snicking open, and the sound of footsteps and chingling keys filtered through the doors.

"Who's there? Come on, come on." The gravelly voice came faintly from the hallway. LaDonna stopped breathing and wished her heart would stop pounding. Had she been caught? The security force had cameras in the halls and T.V. screens on the ground floor for the guards to watch, but LaDonna never worried about the guards because they were old men.

She heard the door to the outer office open, felt eyes on the door to the inner office, and imagined herself being led by the arm to the ground floor. She envisioned the police questioning her, and her father looking at her later with his eyes so dark that his pupils blended with his irises so you couldn't tell what he was thinking. He wouldn't be angry, or sad, or amused, or confused, or anything at all. He would look at her, and through her. He would just take her home, or ask her for a dime for a phone call, joking about the night or the streets or sea monkeys or something, not really talking to her but listening to himself, so she would feel like she wasn't there.

But the outer office door closed and LaDonna could hear the guard moving quickly, opening and closing doors down the hall. Stomach tensed and ears so tuned that the slight noises of the building settling made her ears twitch involuntarily, LaDonna took slow steps out of the inner office and cracked the door to the hallway. Between the hinges of the door she peered left, the direction the security guard had gone. Nobody.

She stepped out of the office and closed the door behind her very carefully with both hands and then stopped for a moment, wondering where to go and where she had left her sweater and shoes.



Then she froze for a second time and remembered that she had left her copies in the elevator and wondered if anyone would be able to recognize her from them. But maybe they wouldn't because her nose would be flattened.

"Hey! Hey!" Shouting and walk-running toward LaDonna, the guard moved with a determination that surprised her. As he loped, his flashlight swung in a half circle around him, alternately banging into his backside, then his thigh. His keys pealed wildly, and with his nightstick in his fist, the guard looked almost comical in his baggy pants and big shoes. LaDonna hadn't expected the guard to be suspicious enough to come back this way. She sprinted down the hallway, not scared of the security guard actually catching her, but afraid of the other people in the building who might also be searching for her. The whole force was probably after her since the guard in the lobby could see her moves through the closed-circuit television cameras. She would have to outrun them all night!

As she ran with stretched legs down the hallway, the doors on both sides blurred like the oaks on the boulevard she would watch from her father's Olds. The elevators wouldn't be safe either, and she thought there would be guards in the stairwells, which seemed like part of another world with slabs of concrete under foot and brown cinderblock walls and iron railings with chipped enamel (and there wasn't any Muzak).

Slowing because security was far behind, she ambled, thinking of the time her father had let the parakeet fly around the living room. When he had opened the cage door, it perched, chirping and tilting its head, unsure whether its luck was good or bad, and then hopped on top of the cage. Then it lifted, flapping to the ceiling, where it bumped and fluttered, again in wonderment. It gyrated around the room for about an hour, fluttering against lamps and books and chairs and finally, after generating momentum and purpose, flew into a shut window and dropped like a stone to the floor. Her father was laughing until then.

She had to go somewhere to hide until the businessmen and the secretaries and the cleaning crew came in so she could mingle with them and slip out. Perhaps that wouldn't be too hard, even with her bare feet and her breasts showing through her shirt, because there were all sorts of people in the building, she assured herself.

But she sensed she had a while to go until morning. A restroom would be perfect. They wouldn't lock a restroom and she was tired and needed a rest.

She heard a security guard's pant legs whisking and heard leather shoes squeak and heavy breathing from far down the hall. The building was shaped in a sort of horseshoe, so there were at least six right-hand corners on each floor--convenient for LaDonna, who knew where the turns were.

There was a camera bolted to the wall on every third corner. Each camera had a red light that glowed like a watchful eye. LaDonna decided that if she could get to another floor, and slip by the camera to a restroom, she would be safe for the night. She could put some water on her face, and get a drink and pee. There were padded benches in the women's room where she could sleep until it got light.

Hoping there was no guard in the fire escape near the stairwell door, LaDonna shouldered it open. It was warm and stuffy there, and after she was on the other side, the door sucked itself closed, airtight. The tomb-like mustiness and the echoing sound made her think that the stairwell went down forever. She hopped, two steps at a time, past 131 and 130, and pulled hard at the door on 129. The air rushed around it, equalizing. Peeking around the jamb, and seeing no cameras, LaDonna let the door shut, holding it so it wouldn't slam. Like a spy or a detective, LaDonna inched, crouching, to the corner. She didn't want to be seen by the next camera.

Again there came the whisking of trousers and tinkling of agitated keys from far down the hall. LaDonna backed to press herself hard against the wall.

But there wasn't a wall. Behind her was the men's room door, which swung inward with her weight. She fell back into the space, landing painfully on her bottom and one elbow, and lay sprawling on the cool ceramic tile floor inside. The door swung again softly. The guard's shoelather squeaked by. He didn't know there was a girl in the men's room.

Lying there, looking up at the darkness, the chemical-sweet odor of disinfectant heavy, LaDonna rubbed the elbow she had landed on and wondered how she had avoided peeing her pants in the fall. Reaching up for support,



it wasn't until her fingers touched the cool water puddled inside that she realized she was grasping at the sculpted porcelain bowl of a urinal. With the serene silence, one hand in the water, sitting up with the cooing of the pigeons outside the window, LaDonna felt as strange as she did in church.

It would have been revolting during the day to have one hand dangling in a urinal touching the disinfectant cake on the rubber mat covering the drain, with men shuffling in and out, but it wasn't bad at night. Rising, she groped around the room, bumping into the covered trash cans and the sinks which jutted out of the wall like buck teeth.

There were no benches to sleep on here. Only the parade of urinals and commode stalls on one wall, and the sinks and panavision mirror on the facing wall. LaDonna realized that she would have to stay awake for the rest of the night.

She shuffled to a sink, found and turned the cold water faucet. Bending over, she rubbed her face with handfuls of icy water. LaDonna was awake. Groping for a paper towel or a machine that blows hot air, she patted the walls around the sinks. But renewed squeaking shoelather and jingling keys stopped her. She stood still like a mime. When the pencil of faint light under the door spread into the room, LaDonna shot over to one of the stalls and crouched on top of the toilet's seat. No time to shut the stall door. She felt exposed.

The security guard stuck his flashlight in the dark room. Like an airplane searchlight, he twirled the beam around the restroom, over by the urinals and under the stalls. He didn't see LaDonna. The door swung shut again and the shoelather creaked and the keys jingled back into the silence.

Crouching on the toilet, with the stall door open facing the mirror over the sinks, she had glimpsed, by the flashlight's brief illumination, the look on her own face. She was a frightened aborigine, with hair wild and body tense. Most disturbing were her eyes. Dark, emotionless, hooded, they were the eyes of her father when her mother left for good.

It seemed like ten, twenty years ago, no--someone else's life, not hers, surely not his. He rarely said anything about it, he never explained it. Yet it

followed him around like a loyal cat--stealthy, and at a respectful distance.

LaDonna sat nodding on the toilet for a long time. She dozed, on and off. When her legs and feet began to tingle, she stood up. The black frosted window had turned blue-grey.

The startled charwoman who came in to clean at seven suggested that LaDonna go to her father's office until he came to work. "He's probably been going nuts all night," the woman said as she escorted LaDonna and an entourage of mops and brooms. LaDonna was too numb from lack of sleep to care what happened. The hard sanitary white of the men's room drained it of the night's mystery.

LaDonna was sleeping in Stone's chair when her father arrived. He didn't look surprised to see her there. "You're going to have to get your hair fixed if you want to be a receptionist," he said to her when he came in.

"Dad, I was trapped in the building all night. The guards chased me and I hid in the men's room."

"The men's room? I really had it out with the president there once."

"Dad, why did mom leave?"

"Because she left."

"But why?"

"Because."

"Oh."

They both went into his office. He sat behind his desk. She dropped into the white swan-shaped chair. The morning sunlight glinted off the gold-plated Rubic's Cube on her father's desk. Underneath it were some Xerox copies of LaDonna's face.

"I found those in the elevator. But your face is all distorted. Don't want 'em, huh?" He paused.



"Did I ever show you my origami sculptures?" he continued, "Watch."

He took a copy of her face and bent the top corner in, and then turned the point down and smoothed it. Then he folded the corners in, bent them in half, and worked this corner and that corner and tucked this tab into that slot. With his fingers a flurry, he bit his lip in concentration.

"There. Whadya think?"

It looked like a cat, but flat and creased. Its black fur was made up of fragments of LaDonna's face. She looked at it. One Xeroxed eye, distorted and half-closed, stared back from the cat's folded spine.

Written for English 246. Mr. Denny majors in English.

## DISCIPLINE

Joseph Whiting

When I came into my room  
frost lined  
the windows so I lit a candle.  
With the candle I lit a cigarette  
and warmed my lungs.  
My breath finally melted the frost.

Pieces of light like shrapnel  
made geometric wounds  
on your bare stomach.  
Somehow through the clouds  
and trees outside,  
through the water on my windows,  
gossamer curtains,  
the moonlight bent  
and painted your body  
a pale silver gray.

I could see the water forming pools on the sill  
and I thought of you driving  
in someone else's car on a dark,  
curving backroad -- only to get home faster  
to ask about my lungs.

My heavy lungs inspire me to eat fruit.  
If I eat an apple, I feel healthy  
and don't have to think about the fact  
that I'm dying inside.

Details interest me tonight.  
Che's vest hangs on the chair beside me.  
Pound sits nestled under a small amber lamp  
(I know how he must have felt in Pisa).  
Jarrett on the turntable.  
My mother's quilts and pillows.  
Marx is tugging at my pantleg.  
Marcuse is napping on my bed.  
Bobbie Kennedy drips blood into  
the bathroom sink.

And you ask me why I'm confused?

I love and curse  
with the same energy



with the same mind  
for the same reasons.

I shouldn't be expected to create the perfect mix.

Yet of all the universes occurring at once,  
there is only one like ours,  
only one piece of light bent just so.

Written for English 246.

# MAKING A COMMITMENT TO WOMEN: LESBIAN FEMINIST PUBLISHING

Elizabeth Reiner

The existence of lesbian feminist publishing houses is tied in with the evolution of the women's movement and the gay rights movement. The printed word in all of its forms--pamphlets, newspapers, magazines, books--is essential to any movement for social change. The movement's press serves two purposes: to make people within the group aware of what others are thinking and doing, and to inform people who are not involved in the movement about the issues and to get them involved. Lesbian feminist publishing is an integral part of the movement that gave birth to it. What is being published and how it is being published reflect the state of the movement.

One of the reasons for establishing lesbian feminist publishing houses is to produce literature that would not otherwise be published--lesbians writing about their own lives and the issues that concern them. Traditional publishing houses are part of the "mainstream," male-dominated heterosexual culture that has no place for lesbians in its patriarchal structure. They produce books that serve their interests, which usually means making a profit. Such interests seldom coincide with lesbian interests.

Radical feminists believe that it is necessary to establish their own female-identified structure in order to better all women's lives. Women cannot ask men to give them what they need, because that simply perpetuates women's dependency. This is the theoretical basis for establishing women's publishing houses, so women can take control and receive the benefits of all the aspects of publishing. They are involved in all the phases of the publishing process, not just the creative aspects of writing and editing. They also typeset, print, bind, promote, and distribute. It is a political victory for women to be able to run their own businesses for their own benefit.

Among the many feminist publishers in the United States, there are six specifically lesbian feminist publishing houses. What keeps them alive and publishing is the commitment of the women involved. Most of the women who work for these houses do not get



paid. Some of them must work at other jobs in order to support the publishing house. Some of the publishers have print shops that take in outside work to pay for the cost of their own books. The group may contain socialists or anarchists or lesbian separatists. The organization of each of the houses is different; some are run by collectives and some give more responsibility to certain staff members and less to others.

At first some of the earlier, now-defunct, women-owned publishing houses for mostly lesbian books, such as the Daughter's Press and the Women's Press Collective, were reluctant to identify themselves as lesbian. They felt the problems they might encounter would not be worth the benefits of "coming out." They could not go to a bank expecting to get a loan and say, "We are lesbian feminist publishers and we need money to finance this book." It is hard to find a landlord who will rent space in a building to a lesbian business. More recently, because of the advances made by the women's movement and the gay rights movement and because of the support systems that have grown out of these movements, lesbian feminist publishers are not afraid to take some risks in order to establish a real identity for themselves.

Metis Press. The Metis Press is an example of how a group of women with a commitment to an ideal, and not much else, became successful publishers. They started in 1976 with a used printing press in a basement. They spent a year and a half learning to run the press and saving money to fix it up, before they even published anything.

The women of Metis Press do printing jobs to help support their publishing and they all work at other jobs to pay the rent. They are committed to the collective process. Production is done in cooperation with the authors, who have the opportunity to learn all the publishing skills.

Metis' most popular title is Wild Women Don't Get the Blues, a novel by Barbara Emrys. They have seven other titles on their list. In addition, they publish Black Maria, a lesbian feminist literary journal that comes out four times a year.

Diana Press. Diana Press was one of the first

lesbian feminist publishing houses. They brought out over 30 titles in eight years and operated a feminist print shop as well. Their demise was not brought about by political or financial problems, but by sabotage. On October 25, 1977, their offices and print shop were broken into. The violence must have been done by people who had some knowledge of printing and knew what would be irreplaceable. Presses were thrown out of adjustment and covered with a combination of ink, cleanser, brake fluid, chemicals, and paint. Ink was poured into the typesetting machine. Ten thousand books were destroyed. Copy and artwork were ripped up, negatives were scratched, printing plates bent. Nobody ever found out who perpetrated these acts of violence, but its effect on Diana was permanent. The financial loss was too great and they were forced to shut down.

Naiad Press. Naiad Press is the largest of the lesbian feminist publishers. They have published 26 titles since they started in 1973 and plan to release 12 more in the next year. Naiad is primarily the work of two women, Barbara Grier and Donna McBride. They have a commitment to publishing material, both fiction and non-fiction, that they feel is needed in the lesbian community. For example, Naiad publishes Black Lesbians, which is a bibliography of writings by and about lesbians of color. These women are usually overlooked by male-identified publishers and suffer under a triple burden of racism, sexism and homophobia.

One of the most controversial books that Naiad has published is Sapphisty by Pat Califia. This is a lesbian sex manual that not only includes descriptions of the "standard" lesbian practices, but also such things as sadomasochism. Many feminists feel that "s/m" is a form of patriarchal violence, whether it is done by a man to a woman or by a woman to another woman. Other women believe that nobody has the right to tell others what they can and cannot do in bed. The women of Naiad like the book very much and they feel that most of the opposition to Califia's ideas comes from other things she has written, especially a series of articles on sadomasochism that she wrote for a gay newspaper, The Advocate.

Persephone Press. The women of Persephone Press have built the fastest-growing feminist publishing



house in the country with their economic and spiritual commitment to the lesbian feminist community. From the beginning, they saw that it was necessary to deal with economic realities in order to produce books in a way that is most helpful to the lesbian community.

Persephone began in 1976 with a book called The Feminist Tarot, which is now in its fourth edition. At that time the press was operated by three women: Gloria Greenfield, Pat McGloin, and Marianne Rubenstein. The capital to start the project came from the women's personal salaries. For the first two years of Persephone's existence, they all worked at other jobs to support themselves and the press. In September of 1979 they became full-time salaried employees of Persephone. The immediate effect of this was a 500% increase in book sales. Besides the paid staff there are women who work regularly without any pay and university students on internships. In 1982 Persephone came out with six new titles, which makes a total of eighteen on their list.

Persephone's economic commitment to women is just as strong as their spiritual commitment to producing women's books. They have a clause in their contracts with authors that says they will not sell the rights to male publishing houses. In this way, all of the money involved goes to women and women's businesses receive all the benefits from the production of their books.

The women of Persephone strive to be innovative. They look for gaps in the existing lesbian feminist literature and try to find ways to fill those gaps. One of their most popular titles is The Coming Out Stories, which is a collection of true stories by women about their "coming out," discovering their own lesbianism and learning to communicate it to those around them. They also perceived a lack of literature concerning black women's lives, so they edited This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color. Another gap has been filled by Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology, which is probably the only book available that deals specifically with Jewish lesbians.

What keeps lesbian feminist publishing alive is

women's strong belief that what they are doing is helping to bring about social change. As Gloria Greenfield of Persephone Press has said:

We envision the press as a lesbian feminist strategy for revolution. Publishing books is an invaluable tool for organizing. We see the books as a means to promote the ideas and challenges . . . Revolution is a process, faster than evolution, where the consciousness of peoples change. The change can eliminate oppression that produces sexism, racism, antisemitism, homophobia and classism. This won't happen on its own.\*

By building a means of communication, giving a voice to women who would not otherwise be heard, these publishers help women to find the strength to change their lives.

#### APPENDIX: ADDRESSES

Cleis Press  
PO Box 8281  
Minneapolis, MN 55408

Metis Press  
PO Box 25187  
Chicago, IL 60625

Naiad Press  
PO Box 10543  
Tallahassee, FL 32302

Persephone Press  
PO Box 7222  
Watertown, MA 02172

Spinsters, Ink  
RD 1  
Argyle, NY 12809

Written for English 291. Ms. Reiner is a French major.

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\* Quoted by Mary Fiorenza in "Persephone: Revolution in Process," Sojourner, 6:12 (August 1981).



POEM BY MICHAELA MARTIN

in the Louvre courtyard  
a man plays the guitar  
the pigeons settle  
one at a time  
but do not rest  
I enter among crowds  
climbing a splendid staircase  
toward a mythical marble woman with wings  
I follow them to the da Vinci chamber  
where they view the Gioconda  
but there is another painting  
whose artist, with his skillful penlight,  
has cut through  
the chalky black  
to reach the cheekbone  
of a young girl

APRIL SHOWERS

Mary Redmond

The window is open this April night.  
Dogs yap unhappily, queer  
Warm air drifts in  
I can't sleep either.

My mouth is sore from smiling.  
There are knots in my back.  
My head spins and I realize I'm  
Bleeding through to the sheets.

Written for English 246. Both Ms. Martin and Ms. Redmond  
major in English

POEM BY GEORGE ROLLER

A beggar on Fifth Avenue  
a stiletto wind cuts his face  
awakens his dissipated mind  
memories incisive and bitter  
waves of dread overcome  
his uncle crawling into his bed  
fetid breath, nightly  
alcohol and sweat  
childhood spent watching  
fire escape's rusted tentacles.  
Port Authority and Grand Central  
the locust life of the beggar  
ebbs away like a cigarette ember

Written for English 246. Mr. Roller majors in Business.



ATMOSPHERIC ALLUSIONS IN KING LEAR AND WUTHERING HEIGHTS

Beth R. Nalewajek

Gusting winds sweeping over barren, pitted moors . . . torrential rain pounding the exposed, flat heath . . . swirling snow and cascading sleet that envelope the earth in a blank whiteness--this is just a sample of the weather imagery developed by William Shakespeare and Emily Brontë in King Lear and Wuthering Heights respectively.\* The images created by each author evoke intense environments or pervasive moods and settings which enhance and often parallel the characters' moods and behavior. With an understanding of the function of weather imagery in both works, deeper truths about them come more sharply into focus.

Significant environments are established in King Lear throughout the use of weather imagery. The chief medium is Shakespeare's verse. On the heath, Lear, Kent, and the Fool plunge into the heart of a storm where

. . . the night comes on, and the high winds  
Do sorely ruffle. For many miles about  
There's scarce a bush. (p. 102)

It is a mysterious and dangerous realm where darkness, rain, and blustery winds vie for control: an unknowable, perilous region. Here is a no-man's-land between the civilized and comprehensible and the unfathomable, uncharted, and disorderly--the uncivilized itself.

Just as Shakespeare creates this meaningful atmosphere in King Lear by using weather imagery, so Emily Brontë employs the weather in Wuthering Heights to design effective and significant environments. But Brontë uses the common language of Nelly Dean as told to and through Lockwood. This creative use of weather imagery is discernible in the many contrasts between Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange.

Brontë's two settings have emphatically different environments. Even the names are suggestive of the starkly contrasting characteristics. The "Wuthering" of Wuthering Heights is "descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather" (p. 10). Wuthering Heights is dark, grim, cold, and bleak, where even "gaunt thorns" stretch

\* Quotations are from the Signet editions of King Lear and Wuthering Heights.

tautly "as if craving alms of the sun" (p. 10). It is located on a windswept, barren, boggy moor, reminiscent of Lear's exposed heath. The weather imagery of the Heights embodies the eerie, mysterious, secretive, unknowable, and extraordinary. Wuthering Heights is a kind of chaos, an abyss continually battered by the weather. This environment is representative of the unknowable, transcendent realm beyond human understanding.

This uncivilized, wild world is brilliantly contrasted with the civilized, proper Thrushcross Grange, whose name evokes the image of a soothing, quiet habitat for birds and peaceful people. It is a comfortable and pleasant atmosphere which has "pure heather-scented air, and the bright sunshine" (p. 198). Even when it snows, the flakes seem to drop serenely. The house itself is inviting. It is the warm world to which Lockwood retreats in his enjoyment of cheerful fires and warm drinks. Thus the weather imagery of the Grange establishes an atmosphere of human comfort and understanding and a society of custom, habit, and good manners and polite behavior.

A similar contrast is found in King Lear between the storm-ravaged heath and Gloucester's castle. The weather imagery of the tumultuous heath, the fierce rain, the empty, howling wind, and the absence of sunshine, serves to bring out the parallel between the uncontrollable forces which break up the sky and the emotional forces in that unknowable region of the mind which overpower Lear's reason and lead to his madness. On the other hand, Gloucester's castle is warm and protected against the tumults of the storm, but not the selfish and savage power-struggling impulses within its doors, such as lead to Edmund's betrayal of his father and brother and the destruction of Gloucester's eyes by Regan and Cornwall. Although both Gloucester's castle and Thrushcross Grange are protected from the weather, altogether different forces operate within them.

Another significant contrast is made between Gloucester's castle and the hovel on the heath. Both are battered by the raging storm; but the intensity of the storm increases the intensities developed in each environment. Vengeful desires intensify inside Gloucester's castle with the prolonged duration of the storm outside it. The greed and power of each wicked character become the dominant, friction-creating forces in the play. On the other hand, at the degraded level of the hovel, as the storm proceeds, so does Lear's awareness



in his insanity. Before the hovel, Edgar, disguised as Tom o'Bedlam, talks nonsense; but he is really lamenting man's condition in society. Even the Fool recognizes the effects of the weather, remarking, "This cold night will turn us all to fools and / madmen" (p. 114). And, of course, Lear himself is profoundly affected by the storm and the state to which it reduces him.

The tumult of the atmospheric forces parallels the storm raging within Lear's mind and heart. Lear enters the mysterious realm of his mind, that of insanity and its rantings and ravings, which parallel the wild weather of the heath. The tyrannical, unmastered elements, which "tear his white / hair" (p. 103) and make everything subject to their convulsive pressures, are similar to the emotional elements of Lear, which tear him apart inside. Lear comes to this state as a result of the loss of the reality to which he has ascribed meaning, the familiar, and the stable. Still, his new state has not simply reduced him to a mere beggerly man, neither king nor father; it has also brought him to awareness about his daughters, the privations and feelings of others, and reality itself. In a sense, by exposing himself to the rain and entering the hovel at the lowest level of humanity, Lear has cleansed himself of the false reality to which he has subscribed, and although mad, he can begin to formulate truths. He has, in fact, weathered the storm.

Lear does not find the storm frightening, because it distracts his thinking. This suggests another interpretation of the role of weather imagery in relation to Lear. The storm is the actual physical extension of his thoughts and feelings. Lear can readily understand the physical essence of the rain and wind for he can feel the wetness and blustery winds that beat his body, but he cannot master them, just as the tumult of his emotions is ungovernable and far less fathomable to him. The intangible, harsh realities and thoughts evoked by his cruel daughters are far worse to handle than the weather. Lear recognizes this, stating,

The tempest in my mind  
Doth from my senses take all feeling else,  
Save what beats there. Filial ingratitude,  
Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand  
For lifting food to't? But I will punish home.  
No, I will weep no more. In such a night  
To shut me out! Pour on, I will endure. (p. 111)

Just as the weather imagery enhances the feelings of characters in *King Lear*, so it aids by illustrating or paralleling the emotions of the characters in *Wuthering Heights*. Whereas Shakespeare emphasizes the bad weather of the storm, Brontë uses both good and bad weather to embody the prevalent moods of the characters. Several of the characters will serve to illustrate this point. Heathcliff, the mysterious, dark, fascinating character, who can never be fully perceived, fits perfectly with the bleak, cold, blustery yet unknowable region of *Wuthering Heights*. Joseph, with his hard-lined Calvinistic morals and Yorkshire dialect, blends into the stark, tumultuous environment of the Heights. Equally, the proper, civilized Edgar Linton belongs to the pleasant, inviting calm of Thrushcross Grange. The change from one of these environments to the other may also engender changes in the characters. This is exhibited by Isabella, who is civilized in the sunshine of the Grange, but who becomes almost wild at the Heights after marrying Heathcliff.

The type of weather imagery often parallels or enlarges the events of the novel. Two of the many examples within the story will serve to exhibit the function of the weather imagery employed. In one scene, the weather parallels the tumult in Cathy's mind and further explains her actions and their meaning. In her madness, Cathy desires an open window, even though it is "the middle middle of winter" and "the wind blew strong from the northeast" (p. 121). In opening the window she feels that she has "a chance of life" (p. 125) and that she would be more herself among the heather, "careless of the frosty air that cut about her shoulders as keen as a knife" (p. 125). Like Lear, she is ranting and raving, but while he is exposed to the storm and would find shelter, she, by opening the window, exhibits her desire to emerge into the blustery weather of the heath, believing that it will return her old self, the wild uncivilized counterpart of Heathcliff. The second example is the scene in which the rain pours into Heathcliff's room and over his face as Nelly discovers his sneering corpse. This is similar to Lear's exposure to rain which results in his regeneration. So is Heathcliff exposed to the elemental water, and he too will be reborn, but in another world.

The weather imagery in *Wuthering Heights* also serves to embody thematic elements. The overriding theme concerns how the characters deal with passion. Since



passionate love or soul-matedness is beyond ordinary understanding, the chaotic, stormy weather of the heath, along with the mysterious, unknowable setting of the Heights, magnifies this theme. Just as the ravaging weather cannot be controlled, passionate love is a mysterious emotion beyond the common efforts of restraint, as exhibited by Nelly Dean's attempt to deal with it. Thus the impassioned weather of the Heights parallels the impassioned, transcendent, almost miraculous love of Heathcliff and Catherine, which is at the same time so destructive. A corollary example is the triumph of selfless, charitable love between Hareton and the younger Catherine. Humility and devotion melt the destructive elements, while the sun, pleasant skies, and the beautiful moon loom over the "radiant countenances" (p. 299) of the lovers.

One theme of King Lear is the ultimate triumph of love and loyalty. The stormy, convulsive weather images Shakespeare creates embody the elements contrasting with this loyalty and goodness. Goneril and Regan allow their father to withstand the raging forces of the storm, thus proving their disloyal cruelty. Their ceremonial behavior is not true to actual reality. An associated theme is the destructiveness of vanity and folly. The blustery winds and torrential rains on the heath parallel Lear's ranting and raving, which are precipitated by the realization of his daughters' characters and of the mistakes due to his vanity and folly. Characteristics of this vanity include his earlier imperiousness, egocentricity, and self-delusion. Another theme concerns regeneration. Just as the rain batters Lear's body and is a physical extension of his emotional state, it also serves to cleanse Lear, enabling his rebirth.

Thus the weather imagery created by Shakespeare in King Lear and Brontë in Wuthering Heights serves to establish appropriate atmospheres; to distinguish between different, meaningful settings; to enhance the moods and traits of the characters and events of the plots; and to embody various aspects of the respective themes. The weather imagery also suggests various views of the authors toward man in general. Shakespeare uses the images of the raging tempest, such as the wild winds and pouring rains on the heath, to depict the disorderliness of man in his fallen state. As Lear has disregarded reason in the division of his kingdom, while Cornwall, Goneril, and Edmund have done so in their pursuit of wealth and power, so has man subverted his

God-given reason by resorting to passion and other animal appetites. On the other hand, Brontë's use of weather imagery suggests another view of mankind. The changes between bad and good weather often correspond to the respective changes in the sentiments of the characters. This suggests that man has no inherent reason and that virtue is guided by sentiments built by the associations of sensory perceptions. The chaotic and tempestuous atmosphere of the Heights, a realm of imagination, serves as the border between all that is knowable through our senses and all that cannot be ordinarily understood, the area to which the unearthly, extraordinary concept of transcendental love belongs. Therefore, the weather imagery in these works functions not only to elucidate elements of setting, character, plot, and theme, but also serves as a guide toward a deeper understanding of Shakespeare's and Brontë's views of man in the universe.

Written for English 291. Author majors in French.



## BEAT THE BUMPER

Kevin Kraynick

I used to be famous. My name is Danny Morris. Chances are you don't remember my name or what I did. I was something of a folk hero for about two months when I was sixteen. A couple of years have passed since then and now I'm just another freaking face in the crowd.

Back then I lived in Wallingford, Connecticut, where I was pretty much your average suburbanized kid. I always liked going to school because it was a means of escaping my over-competitive and disheartening family life. Even though my grades were far from adequate, they were high enough to keep me out of trouble. I was at that fragile age when I didn't like anyone telling me that I had to read *Great Expectations* or memorize some freaking formulas. I just wanted a little time away from home, not a goddamned education.

My older brother, Frank, however, was one of those perfect, All-American youths any parent would be proud to call his own. He was captain of our high school's baseball and basketball teams, president of his class, a very good student, and a constant pain in my ass.

My mother, a high-strung Italian woman, loved Frank more than anything in the world, except trying to give me the worst inferiority complex known to mankind. As far as she was concerned I would never measure up to Frank's standards, and she reminded me of this whenever she had free time on her hands. Frank always got a big kick out of this, being the snotty, egocentric bastard he was, and whenever she belittled me in front of him, he would stand behind her with his chest thrust out and sneer with approval.

Frank was like that, real cocky. I figured my mother liked him because he was the oldest and my father was dead. They made quite a pair, my mother and Frank. They had the kind of relationship you'd find between a professional wrestler and his manager. She was constantly bragging about his accomplishments and patting him on the back for every little freaking thing he did.

## II

One morning, late in October of 1978, I was in a terrific hurry to get to school because my science class was going on a field trip to Boston. My mother, however, was in no mood to see me rush out the door and off to school without giving me one of my traditional doses of torment.

"Are you going to Boston with these pens?" she asked as she browsed through my book bag.

"Yeah, I guess so," I responded.

"You guess so. You guess so! Look at the caps on these pens. There are chew marks all over them. Frank never chewed on his pen caps. Look at your pens, they're disgusting. I hope no one in Boston knows you're my son."

"Don't be ridiculous, Mom. We don't know anyone in Boston."

"Oh, that mouth of yours. You've always got an answer for everything, Morris."

I knew I was in for a load of shit then, because my mother only used to call me by my last name when she was really ticked off about something. Rather than stay and quibble over my mutilated pen caps, I decided to escape and sprinted out the front door with my things.

"I have to get going, Mom. I don't want to be late," I said on my way out.

"Come back here, Danny," she yelled after me. "Come back here, you little bum."

## III

The bus ride to Boston was pretty uneventful, thanks to the watchful eye of our science teacher, Mrs. Cromm. She was in her late fifties, wore her greying hair in a large bun on top of her head, and sported a very prominent set of sideburns. She was one of those teachers you couldn't pull anything over on, no matter how hard you tried.



During the trip I sat with Kyle Larson, my best friend at the time. He was one of those crazy kids that most parents wished their children wouldn't hang around with. I know my mother wished I didn't. She told me several times.

Kyle was a pretty harmless looking character. He had medium-length, bright red hair, a swarm of freckles on his face, and a pair of ears attached perpendicularly to his head. He was also really scrawny and had large feet which made him kind of waddle.

Kyle used to do weird things just for the sake of doing them. Once when he was having x-rays of his broken arm taken at the hospital, he let out a primal scream when the attendant flicked the x-ray switch on. The attendant must have thought something backfired because she was by Kyle's side in a flash looking for radiation burns. He was a real pisser, Kyle was.

Our first stop in Boston was the New England Aquarium. Mrs. Cromm herded us all out of the bus when we got there, with the assistance of two students' mothers who had volunteered to be Cromm's storm troopers. Outside of the entrance Mrs. Cromm broke our class down into three groups. Kyle and I were assigned to the one led by Mrs. Lordley, mother of Sally Lordley, a girl who was so prim and proper that it made me sick.

Mrs. Lordley led our group into the aquarium and slowly guided us from exhibit to exhibit. After about a half hour of this Kyle got pretty bored with looking at aquatic creatures and tried to talk me into sneaking out of the complex.

"C'mon, it'll be easy," he persuaded. "How much more of this marine shit can you take? They'll be looking through this place for another hour because the dolphin show doesn't start till then. On top of that, the dolphin show is probably about an hour long. That leaves us two hours to cruise around on our own."

"I don't know," I replied. "We'll get in a lot of trouble if Cromm catches us."

"That's only if she catches us. All I know is I can't look at another goddamned fish. Let's go now while Lordley isn't looking."

Looking back at times like these I can understand why my mother didn't like me hanging around Kyle. The screwy bastard was constantly leading me down the road to damnation and I was always stupid enough to follow. The incident at the aquarium was no exception. While Mrs. Lordley was boring our group with an impromptu lecture on the benefits man receives from the marine world, which, oddly enough, she was giving in front of the piranha tank, Kyle and I slid out of sight and headed for the exit.

#### IV

After several blocks of aimless wandering we ended up on the outskirts of Quincy Market. In that short period Kyle, always the daredevil, had managed to risk his life three times while crossing the street. He was playing "Beat the Bumper" with oncoming traffic. After his third sprint with death, Kyle boasted that he would be the next Evel Knievel. I told him he was going to be the next dead bonehead.

As Kyle and I approached the market's central building in search of food, we were intercepted by a bum selling pencils. He couldn't have been under seventy-five years old or over five feet tall. His face was a mass of wrinkled flesh and whiskers, and his eyes were hidden by the brim of his weather-beaten, maroon baseball cap. He was wearing a black cotton winter jacket that was pouring out stuffing at every seam and he supported his bony frame with the aid of a walking cane that had once been a hockey stick.

"Wanna buy any pencils?" he grumbled, thrusting a rusty coffee can full of them in front of us.

"Naw, sorry buddy, but I have all the pencils I need," Kyle responded.

"Not these kind of pencils. These are very fine pencils," the bum said, holding one up for inspection. Kyle took the pencil out of the bum's hand and slowly rolled it between the fingers and thumb of his right hand, examining it carefully.



"Fine pencils, my ass," Kyle said after his inspection was complete. "They don't even have erasers for Christ's sake. What good is a pencil without an eraser?"

"Well, you can still write with it, ya know. Don't need no eraser to write," the bum replied.

"Yeah, but you need one to erase mistakes. That's why most people use goddamned pencils, so they can erase their mistakes. If they don't care about mistakes, they use ball-point pens, not pencils without erasers."

The grubby old man seemed a little hurt by Kyle's criticism. He lowered his head and without a word he hobbled over to a nearby bench. I felt kind of sorry for the little guy, but Kyle merely became more excited by the bum's retreat. Kyle loved a good argument, especially one he knew he could win, so he walked over to the bench the bum had escaped to.

"One more thing," Kyle said, "How can you sell pencils when you aren't even blind? I thought only blind people could sell pencils. It's a goddamned law or something."

"I might not be blind, but I'm very poor and that's almost as bad. Now why don't you just leave me alone if you don't wanna buy my pencils," the old man said.

I had remained silent up until then, but I figured Kyle had harassed the bum enough and tried to get him to move on. Kyle pretended he didn't hear me.

"You know," he continued. If you had the sense to sell pens I might have bought one from you, but I can get better pencils than yours for free at any goddamn miniature golf course."

"Please leave me alone. I don't need this abuse," the bum whimpered as he pushed himself off the bench and limped toward the street in front of us.

Kyle started following the bum again, but this time I grabbed him by his coat sleeve and wouldn't

let go. That was my one advantage over Kyle--I was much bigger than he was.

"Take it easy, Kyle," I said. "We've already skipped out on the field trip. I don't feel like getting arrested on top of it."

It was then I took note of what the bum was doing. He was so busy looking over his shoulder to see if Kyle was on his trail that he didn't notice he was stepping right into the path of a station wagon as he crossed the street. Something came over me, the hell if I know what it was, and before I knew it I was sprinting in front of the station wagon to save the bum. I wasn't fast enough, though, because the bumper of the car clipped my left knee and I went crashing to the pavement, head first, with the old man wrapped safely in my arms.

# V

Six hours later I came to in a hospital room with my left leg in a cast and my head wrapped in bandages. Mrs. Cromm, uglier than ever, was sitting in a chair at the foot of my bed reading a National Geographic when she noticed that I had opened my eyes.

"Danny Morris, my little hero. How are you feeling, dear? Can I get you anything?" she asked, smiling the whole time.

I had never seen Mrs. Cromm smile like that before. As a matter of fact, I had never seen her smile at all. The only conclusion that I could come up with was that she was on some sort of heavy medication.

"If you could get me a new body I'd appreciate it," I said. "Otherwise I'm fine. Where's the class? Are they waiting outside?"

"No, they all went home. It's almost seven o'clock. I decided to stay behind until your mother got here. She should arrive in about an hour or so."

Then Mrs. Cromm filled me in on everything that had happened since my daring rescue. Kyle and the



bum, who had only got a little scuffed up in the incident, carried me to the safety of the sidewalk while the driver of the station wagon ran to get an ambulance. Kyle dashed off to get Mrs. Cromm and the bum stayed behind to keep an eye on me. The ambulance arrived in a short time and I was rushed to the hospital.

In the meantime, word of my brave feat swiftly circulated through Boston and reports of the incident were featured on every local evening news program at six o'clock. Also, someone in the crowd of onlookers took a picture of the bum sitting cross-legged with my head resting in his lap and U.P.I. bought it from him, intending to circulate the photo nationally. In short, I had become a modern day hero in a matter of hours.

## VI

The U.P.I. picture was run on the front page of most major newspapers in America on the following day. That evening I watched Walter Cronkite conclude his newscast with a brief commentary on my heroics. He said, "We should all learn something, as Americans, from the little boy who saved the bum." I got the biggest kick out of that. Me, Danny Morris, a role model for every American!

Life in Wallingford couldn't have been better after I returned home from the hospital. School was a real pisser. I instantly became the most popular kid in my high school. The whole place went nuts when a reporter and a photographer from People Magazine came to school to assemble a photo-essay on me. I really didn't see what the big deal was, because I couldn't stand the magazine to begin with. Everyone seemed to think it was a miracle of sorts, though. They only gave my story one page in the issue it appeared in, so it wasn't any big deal or anything. A freaking cigarette ad in the same issue got two pages.

I don't think there was a person in the whole school, faculty included, who didn't sign the cast on my leg. A lot of them thought it might be placed in a museum someday or something foolish like that, so they wanted to make sure their names were

on it. People turn into real fruit loops when it comes to fame. They all want to get a piece of the action.

One bad thing came of the field trip, however. Kyle was suspended from school for leaving the aquarium without Mrs. Cromm's permission. I thought that was kind of funny, considering that I was guilty of the same crime and the administration was treating me like a freaking deity. Kyle didn't appreciate that fact and he never forgave me for it.

My mother and I got along great after I returned home from Boston. Thanks to me she acquired a new hobby--telling as many people as possible that it was her son who saved the bum. She bought me anything I wanted and praised me whenever she had a chance. Her warmth and kindness shocked me at first, but after awhile I got used to it. Actually, I freaking well wallowed in it. The last time I had received attention like this was after I was born and I didn't even remember that.

I replaced Frank as the main attraction of our household and, in the process, he had trouble coping with being shoved off his pedestal. He was constantly trying to gain my mother's attention, but she wasn't interested in anything Frank had to tell her. Once he came home with straight A's on his report card and my mother asked him if he wanted a medal. Following this, Frank's grades plummeted, his ego collapsed, and the future super collegian ended up taking a full-time job as a bookkeeper for some third-rate insurance company.

## VII

Today I'm a freshman at M.I.T. I left most of my mementos of the great day in Boston at home in my closet, like my cast and the maroon cap the bum gave me. The only thing I brought up to college was the page my story was on in People. It's taped to the wall facing my bed. I know I never liked the freaking magazine much, but the story's printed on expensive, shiny paper, and one thing I've learned in life is that you've really made it if you've gone glossy.

Written for Eng. 146. Mr. Kraynick majors in English.



4:57 PM

Jane E. Harvey

Bleary eyed day. Ends with  
the sun setting behind a wall of clouds.  
A painful light.

Half-changed autumn trees are dirty,  
choke on the exhaust, sit and  
watch cars hurry up to wait  
at the light green and red.

All aboard. Sit alone by the window high above  
the filth and moving asphalt.  
Forget about the choking diesel, no smoking please.

I am rocked into stupor by the swaying.

Drive past houses I love, would like to live in,  
sit on the porch with coffee in the morning.  
Brick houses, black shutters  
dogs, kids, dinner's ready.

The bus drives past.  
I wouldn't want to leave there, because the bus drives past.

Written for English 246.

Writing UConn, Spring 1983 is  
a publication of the Connecticut  
Writing Project, an affiliate of  
the National Writing Project.  
Information about the Connecticut  
Writing Project, its Summer Insti-  
tutes on the Teaching of Writing,  
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development programs can be  
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